

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

February 10, 2004

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: A. McBeath, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Response to Presentations by Edmonton Public Teachers Local 37, CUPE Local 3550, CUPE Local 474, CUPE Local 784 and Exempt Staff

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RESOURCE
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INFORMATION

This report is provided in response to budget presentations made to the Board of Trustees by the five district staff groups. Edmonton Public Teachers Local 37 of the ATA and CUPE Local 3550, representing support staff, made presentations on January 13, 2004. CUPE Local 474, representing custodial staff, CUPE Local 784, representing construction and maintenance staff, and a representative of exempt staff made presentations on January 27, 2004.

There were several themes that were common to a number of the presentations, and these will be addressed first in the report, followed by specific responses to issues raised in the individual presentations.

Impact of Staff Reductions

Many of the presentations touched on the impact of the significant staff reductions that occurred prior to the start of the 2003-2004 school year. Each group expressed concern about the cumulative effects of increased workloads, larger class sizes, fewer resources and higher stress on remaining staff. The district understands this concern and recognizes that current and future budget decisions must focus on increasing the number of staff, particularly in those areas which directly impact the classroom. As a first step, the board allocated all of the additional funds received in December to the schools, resulting in slight increases in teaching, support and custodial FTEs. Without a substantial increase in funding, it will take several years to establish improved staffing levels. Through the budgeting process, the district will continue to examine ways to ensure the most effective, efficient and economical use of the funds allocated to the district for the education of students. The board will also continue to advocate strongly on behalf of parents, staff and students, for increased funding that is fair to Edmonton Public Schools and recognizes the unique challenges and opportunities in district classrooms. The board recognizes and appreciates the support and collaborative approach taken by the staff groups in continuing to advocate for increased funding for public education.

Plant Operations and Maintenance (PO&M) Funding

All of the non-teaching staff groups raised issues related to the PO&M funding provided by Alberta Infrastructure. Concerns were expressed about the district's low space utilization rate and the government's desire to pursue public-private partnerships as a method of building schools. The district is aware of the problems related to space utilization and is addressing the issue in various ways. With regard to the issue of partnerships, the board is pleased that recent new schools have included public-public partnerships.

While there was a general recognition from some staff groups that stopping the transfer of funds between the instructional and PO&M funding blocks would be beneficial, there was also a perception that in the past the district's practice was to use funds allocated for PO&M for instructional purposes. The reality is that, due to funding restrictions imposed by low utilization rates, recent district practice has been to annually transfer up to 2% of instructional grants (approximately \$7.4 million) to cover expenditures related to PO&M. The provincial government recognizes and the district appreciates that it will take time to adjust to the decision to stop the transfer of funds from the instructional block to address PO&M requirements. The board also welcomed the government's realization that PO&M funding to the district was inadequate and that additional funds were provided for the current school year. The district acknowledges that both the custodial and maintenance staff groups are suggesting options to address the current level of PO&M funding and provision of services. The district agrees that all options will need to be considered in addressing this issue and that flexibility will be critical in balancing the needs and requirements for maintenance, custodial and utilities expenditures within the PO&M block of funding. The district is confident that our current relationship with both Locals will help to facilitate the discussions needed to address these complex issues.

Health and Safety

With regard to the development of a safe and healthy workplace and learning environment, the district welcomes the collaborative projects undertaken by joint committees made up of representatives of the administration and staff groups. These committees are addressing general health and safety issues as well as specific issues related to: custodial and maintenance safe work practices; the staff and student safety issues regarding the teaching of science and Career and Technology Studies (CTS); safe return to work practices; and, the benefits of conflict resolution training provided through collaboration on the ATA's *Healthy Interactions* project. The board also shares the concern that there is no additional government funding to address the new requirements for extensive occupational health and safety training and implementation. In a recent meeting with the Ministers of Infrastructure and Learning, the Board Chairman raised serious concerns about the impact of the new Occupational Health and Safety regulations on district finances.

Professional Development

The board understands that ongoing professional development and training for all staff is critical to ensuring that Edmonton Public Schools remain one of the top districts in the world. The administration is currently preparing a staff development framework that will address current and future needs and requirements of the district. This draft framework will be shared over the next few months for review and input with several stakeholders, including all staff groups. The revised staff development framework will then be brought to board as information before the end of the school year. The administration believes that many of the professional development and training issues raised in the staff groups' budget presentations will be addressed through this framework.

Edmonton Public Teachers Local 37 of the ATA

The board appreciates the support of the Local in highlighting the need for proper funding for public education, and also looks forward with optimism to the implementation of the majority of recommendations of the Learning Commission. Our students deserve nothing less than this.

The board is also proud of the continued strong and mutually respectful relationship with the Local and provincial arms of the ATA. The administration is pleased that we have been able to work collaboratively to resolve small and large issues to the benefit of staff and students alike.

As indicated previously, the board comprehends the significant impact of the loss of teaching positions and the effect on: teachers who could not be offered continuing contracts; the teachers who carry out their professional responsibilities in light of these difficulties; and on the students whose education is our strongest mutual interest. The board is committed to increasing the number of teaching staff in the classroom through current and future budget processes.

While the district also will not comment on specific issues currently being discussed at the bargaining table, the board does recognize and appreciate the benefits of local bargaining. This arrangement has led to an ongoing relationship that values meaningful involvement of teachers in those decisions that affect the classroom; it also demonstrates that district teachers feel respected, confident and valued by the board.

CUPE Local 3550 – Support Staff

The board recognizes and appreciates the direct and indirect roles that support staff have in meeting the district's focus of achieving superb results from all students.

As indicated previously, the board acknowledges the impact of the support staff FTE reductions on the staff and schools involved in the bumping and layoff processes in June 2003. The board shares the Local's concern that, whether staff were laid off, bumped or affected by the reassignment of duties, the impact was personal and significant for these support staff, their colleagues and other staff in the schools and central departments. As

noted, the district is committed to increasing the number of support staff to necessary levels to support teaching and learning in the classroom.

The district also recognizes and appreciates the importance of professional development, training and mentoring for all support staff. Support staff will be consulted regarding the staff development framework and the administration will invite the Local to nominate staff to be members of a committee that will specifically examine the training and development needs of support staff.

The board is also grateful for the continued support which Local 3550 provides to trustees in representing the interests of parents, students and community members in advocating on behalf of public education.

CUPE Local 474 – Custodial

The board is aware and supportive of the Local's continued focus on ensuring district schools provide safe, clean and appropriate learning environments for our students, parents, staff and communities.

The district recognizes that custodial staff, like the other staff groups, were affected by the staff reductions that occurred over the past year. The district also acknowledges the impact that space utilization rates have had on the level of PO&M funding we receive. The board shares the concerns the Local has raised regarding workload, health and safety and productivity when the district only receives approximately two-thirds of the funding necessary for cleaning and maintaining our schools and other facilities. The district understands this situation will become more difficult as instructional block funding no longer can be used to offset the costs associated with the PO&M needs and requirements of our schools. The district and Local have begun discussions on options to address some of these issues (e.g., utilities expenditures). The board encourages the administration and the Local to continue these discussions as other options are considered to address all of the issues and interests associated with PO&M funding and facility utilization.

In terms of issues related to health and safety, and training and development, the district wishes to acknowledge the work of the various joint committees in addressing issues of safe work practices, mandatory health and safety training and basic skills/ESL. Regarding the latter, the district is hopeful that the work of members of the Local and staff in Personnel Services, Consulting Services and Metro Community College will be successful in obtaining federal grants to commence this important project and develop curriculum. The board appreciates the support that the Local and CUPE National are providing to the basic skills initiative. Regarding technology, the district recognizes that all staff feel the impact of the technological changes that affect the way we do our work. The district acknowledges that while access to computers has increased for custodial staff, more work can be done in this area.

CUPE Local 784 – Maintenance

The board recognizes and appreciates the desire and contribution that maintenance staff demonstrate in ensuring a safe and healthy environment for our students, staff and community. The board also acknowledges that maintenance staff bring a unique and important perspective to the operation of the district and their views and input are valued.

As a percentage of total staff, maintenance staff were hard hit by staff reductions. The board understands and appreciates the impact these reductions have had on the staff who have been laid off and on the staff remaining. The board also understands the need to examine options for providing maintenance services in the district, especially in light of the changes in utilization of PO&M funds. The administration will continue to have discussions with the Local to explore options for providing the most effective and efficient maintenance services in the district. The district also looks forward to continued discussions related to health and safety, access to technology and training and access to schools.

Exempt Staff

The district recognizes the role exempt staff have in supporting the focus on teaching and learning. The district also acknowledges the broad range of skills represented in the exempt staff group and the contributions made by this group to the effective and efficient operation of the district. The board also appreciates the diversity of expertise required of exempt staff and recognizes the need for ongoing professional development. The district is also aware of and values the dedication of exempt staff in meeting the increasing demands placed upon them.

DF/dmf